

Panorama report was not biased, claims TV producer

SCHOOL'S BID TO BOOST READING

PUPILS at a preparatory school took part in a book fair with their parents. St Michael's Prep School in Hadleigh Road, Leigh, encouraged reading in and out of the classroom, by hosting a book fair organised by Essex Travelling Books. It gave parents and pupils a sample of recent releases and a chance to enjoy favourite authors. Tales of dinosaurs, monsters and adventure stories topped a poll of the books.



■ Reading together - Gina Stevenson and daughter, Lydia

By JON AUSTIN

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A PRODUCER has defended a BBC Panorama documentary about the Dale Farm eviction after it emerged a pro-traveller protester was used as a reporter.

Hazel Scillitoe, a freelance film-maker, has been a supporter of families at the Dale Farm site in Oak Lane, Crays Hills for more than eight years.

She acted as the site's official spokeswoman and was responsible for dealing with the press at Dale Farm in the run up to October's eviction.

Ms Scillitoe helped make a BBC Panorama documentary, called the Big Eviction, about the illegal site and was employed on a freelance basis to cover a council meeting about the eviction earlier this year.

Hardcash Productions, which made the film, screened in October, said it was one of many companies which paid Ms Scillitoe to film Dale Farm footage.

David Henshaw, executive

Dale Farm supporter helped make BBC special on eviction

producer at Hardcash Productions, said she had no input into the "content or direction" of the programme.

He said the Big Eviction was made entirely along BBC guidelines of fairness and impartiality, with Hardcash "bending over backwards" to represent the council's views.

Mr Henshaw said his company did not receive a complaint about Ms Scillitoe's behaviour at the meeting until four months after it had taken place.

He said producers arranged a meeting with the council because it wanted to ensure the film was balanced. Mr Henshaw said Hardcash was given "limited filming opportunities" with him and all of the footage was used in the programme.

He added: "Any suggestion it was not balanced would be wholly inaccurate."

Basildon Council complained Ms Scillitoe was seen cheering

and applauding in the press area of the council chamber while opposition councillors spoke out against the eviction. It said her behaviour could call into question the BBC documentary's impartiality.

In a document detailing the complaint, a council official said he had contacted Hardcash to raise his concerns, who said it had no idea if Ms Scillitoe had been paid. It stated: "It still meant people who were very firmly embedded on one side of the Dale Farm dispute were heavily involved in the production of that Panorama episode."

Hardcash was commissioned by the BBC to produce films about Dale Farm. After the screening, the BBC received 80 complaints the programme was biased towards travellers.

The BBC previously apologised for showing an "unfair" report on the eviction on the One Show.



MUSIC LESSONS FOR COMPLETE BEGINNERS

